newstats bureau of statistics

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Language
— 2011 Census —

Recently, Statistics Canada released information on languages from the 2011 Census. While Canada has two official languages, English & French, the Northwest Territories has 11 official languages; the Census is an important tool to gauge the vitality of these languages.

Mother tongue is defined as the first language learned at home during childhood and still understood. Similar to previous years, English remains the predominant mother tongue language in the Northwest Territories. In 2011, 31,380 persons stated that English was their mother tongue, representing 77.5% of the population, a slight increase from 2006 (Table 1).

Table 1 Population by Selected Mother Tongue Languages
Northwest Territories, 2006 & 2011

	2011		2006	
	No. of Persons	%	No. of Persons	%
Total Single responses	**40,500**	**100.0**	**41,055**	**100.0**
English	31,380	77.5	31,545	76.8
French	1,075	2.7	975	2.4
Cree	135	0.3	390	0.9
Dene (Incl. Chipewyan)	450	1.1	440	1.1
Gwich'in	250	0.6	190	0.5
Inuinnaqtun	90	0.2	55	0.1
Inuktitut & Inuvialuktun	595	1.5	750	1.8
North Slavey*	735	1.8	835	2.0
South Slavey*	1,200	3.0	1,285	3.1
Tłįchǫ (Dogrib)	1,965	4.9	1,950	4.7
Tagalog	545	1.3	505	1.2
German	185	0.5	190	0.5
Vietnamese	155	0.4	305	0.7
Arabic	150	0.4	105	0.3

*Responses coded to 'Slavey' were distributed to North and South Slavey by geography.

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Those with French as a mother tongue increased from 2.4% of the population in 2006 to 2.7% in 2011. The number of persons who had an aboriginal language as their mother tongue decreased from 5,720 in 2006 to 5,485 in 2011 representing a decline of 4.1%.

Table 2 Population by Selected Mother Tongue Languages and Age Group
Northwest Territories, Census 2011

	All Ages	%	0 - 14 Years	%	15 - 24 Years	%	25 - 44 Years	%	45 - 64 Years	%	65 & older	%
English	31,380	100.0	7,880	25.1	5,720	18.2	9,470	30.2	7,265	23.2	1,040	3.3
French	1,075	100.0	155	14.4	80	7.4	415	38.6	365	34.0	60	5.6
Cree	135	100.0	5	3.7	5	3.7	25	18.5	60	44.4	45	33.3
Dene (Incl. Chipewyan)	450	100.0	20	4.4	20	4.4	95	21.1	200	44.4	110	24.4
Gwich'in	250	100.0	5	2.0	15	6.0	40	16.0	75	30.0	115	46.0
Inuinnaqtun	85	100.0	5	5.9	10	11.8	25	29.4	35	41.2	10	11.8
Inuktitut	185	100.0	25	13.5	20	10.8	60	32.4	70	37.8	10	5.4
Inuvialuktun	405	100.0	25	6.2	30	7.4	95	23.5	155	38.3	100	24.7
North Slavey*	715	100.0	40	5.6	80	11.2	195	27.3	255	35.7	120	16.8
South Slavey*	1,190	100.0	120	10.1	100	8.4	345	29.0	460	38.7	195	16.4
Tłįchǫ (Dogrib)	1,960	100.0	340	17.3	285	14.5	665	33.9	515	26.3	155	7.9
Multiple responses	540	100.0	90	16.7	80	14.8	175	32.4	130	24.1	65	12.0

*Responses coded to 'Slavey' were distributed to North and South Slavey by geography.

Table 2 shows the distribution of mother tongue languages by age group. With the exception of Tłįchǫ, the population with an aboriginal language as a mother tongue is highly concentrated in the older age categories. Half of those aged 45 years and over spoke an aboriginal language as their mother tongue compared to 21% for those less than 25 years of age.

By community, Wekweètì had the highest proportion of persons with an aboriginal language as their mother tongue (71%), followed by Gamètì at 69% and Trout Lake at 68% (Table 3). Both Wekweètì and Trout Lake showed increases from 2006 while Gamètì declined over the same period. Of those with French as their mother tongue, 75% (810 persons) reside in Yellowknife.

Table 3 Population by Mother Tongue and Community
Northwest Territories, 2011

	Total	%	English	%	French	%	Aborig. Langs	%	Other Langs	%	Mult. Langs	%
Northwest Territories	**41,040**	**100.0**	**31,375**	**76.4**	**1,080**	**2.6**	**5,480**	**13.4**	**2,565**	**6.3**	**535**	**1.3**
Beaufort Delta	**6,640**	**100.0**	**5,465**	**82.3**	**75**	**1.1**	**730**	**11.0**	**180**	**2.7**	**185**	**2.8**
Aklavik	625	100.0	535	85.6	5	0.8	80	12.8	5	0.8	-	-
Fort McPherson	785	100.0	615	78.3	15	1.9	150	19.1	10	1.3	5	0.6
Inuvik	3,405	100.0	2,975	87.4	55	1.6	210	6.2	165	4.8	5	0.1
Paulatuk	315	100.0	250	79.4	5	1.6	25	7.9	5	1.6	30	9.5
Sachs Harbour	110	100.0	90	81.8	-	-	25	22.7	-	-	-	-
Tsiigehtchic	145	100.0	130	89.7	-	-	15	10.3	-	-	-	-
Tuktoyaktuk	855	100.0	660	77.2	5	0.6	100	11.7	-	-	90	10.5
Ulukhaktok	400	100.0	215	53.8	-	-	120	30.0	5	1.3	60	15.0
Sahtu	**2,340**	**100.0**	**1,665**	**71.2**	**15**	**0.6**	**620**	**26.5**	**30**	**1.3**	**5**	**0.2**
Colville Lake	145	100.0	90	62.1	-	-	55	37.9	-	-	-	-
Déljne	470	100.0	180	38.3	-	-	290	61.7	-	-	5	1.1
Fort Good Hope	515	100.0	365	70.9	5	1.0	135	26.2	5	1.0	-	-
Norman Wells	725	100.0	660	91.0	10	1.4	30	4.1	25	3.4	5	0.7
Tulita	475	100.0	370	77.9	-	-	105	22.1	5	1.1	5	1.1
Tłı̨chǫ	**2,805**	**100.0**	**1,140**	**40.6**	**5**	**0.2**	**1,625**	**57.9**	**20**	**0.7**	**15**	**0.5**
Behchokǫ̀	1,920	100.0	840	43.8	5	0.3	1,065	55.5	5	0.3	10	0.5
Gamèti	255	100.0	65	25.5	-	-	175	68.6	10	3.9	-	-
Wekweèti	140	100.0	40	28.6	-	-	100	71.4	5	3.6	-	-
Whatì	490	100.0	195	39.8	-	-	290	59.2	-	-	5	1.0
Dehcho	**3,225**	**100.0**	**1,995**	**61.9**	**30**	**0.9**	**1,140**	**35.3**	**35**	**1.1**	**25**	**0.8**
Fort Liard	535	100.0	260	48.6	5	0.9	265	49.5	5	0.9	-	-
Fort Providence	730	100.0	430	58.9	5	0.7	295	40.4	5	0.7	5	0.7
Fort Simpson	1,225	100.0	910	74.3	25	2.0	260	21.2	20	1.6	10	0.8
Hay River Reserve	285	100.0	200	70.2	-	-	80	28.1	-	-	5	1.8
Kakisa	45	100.0	25	55.6	-	-	20	44.4	-	-	-	-
Nahanni Butte	100	100.0	50	50.0	-	-	55	55.0	-	-	-	-
Trout Lake	95	100.0	25	26.3	5	5.3	65	68.4	-	-	5	5.3
South Slave	**6,825**	**100.0**	**5,870**	**86.0**	**145**	**2.1**	**520**	**7.6**	**260**	**3.8**	**30**	**0.4**
Enterprise	85	100.0	80	94.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	5.9
Fort Resolution	475	100.0	360	75.8	-	-	100	21.1	10	2.1	-	-
Fort Smith	2,060	100.0	1,855	90.0	25	1.2	130	6.3	45	2.2	10	0.5
Hay River	3,555	100.0	3,115	87.6	100	2.8	135	3.8	195	5.5	5	0.1
Łutselk'e	295	100.0	160	54.2	-	-	125	42.4	5	1.7	5	1.7
Yellowknife Area	**19,205**	**100.0**	**15,240**	**79.4**	**810**	**4.2**	**845**	**4.4**	**2,030**	**10.6**	**275**	**1.4**
Detah	210	100.0	115	54.8	-	-	85	40.5	5	2.4	5	2.4
Yellowknife	18,995	100.0	15,125	79.6	810	4.3	760	4.0	2,030	10.7	270	1.4

Home language is the language most often spoken at home. Nearly 89% of the population in the NWT spoke English as their home language. In the Northwest Territories, use of official aboriginal languages as a home language remained similar to the proportions from 2006. Use of Tłı̨chǫ, Gwich'in and Dene (including Chipewyan) increased slightly over the past 5 years. French as a home language also increased from 2006 and is currently used by 1.3% of the population.

Table 4 Population by Selected Home Language
Northwest Territories, 2006 & 2011

	2011		2006	
	No. of Persons	%	No. of Persons	%
Total responses	**41,040**	**100.0**	**41,060**	**100.0**
English	36,480	88.9	36,795	89.6
French	550	1.3	440	1.1
Cree	20	0.0	20	0.0
Dene (Incl. Chipewyan)	170	0.4	130	0.3
Gwich'in	35	0.1	20	0.0
Inuinnaqtun	20	0.0	20	0.0
Inuktitut & Inuvialuktun	125	0.3	135	0.3
North Slavey*	320	0.8	460	1.1
South Slavey*	510	1.2	520	1.3
Tłı̨chǫ (Dogrib)	1,205	2.9	1,095	2.7
Tagalog	300	0.7	280	0.7
Vietnamese	145	0.4	300	0.7
Arabic	100	0.2	85	0.2
Multiple Responses	390	1.0	245	0.6

*Responses coded to 'Slavey' were distributed to North and South Slavey by geography.

In the Northwest Territories, approximately 3,715 persons or 9.1% of the population can speak both French and English well enough to carry on a conversation, a slight increase from 2006. The age distribution of those able to speak both official languages of Canada also remained similar to 2006 with approximately 39% under the age of 25, 35% aged 25 – 44 years and 27% aged 45 years and older.

Language retention may be characterized by the ratio of home language to mother tongue. If the ratio is greater than 1, then the language may be considered relatively healthy. By contrast, if the ratio is less than one, the language is showing signs of degradation. In 2011, with the exception of English, all languages are indicating a ratio less than 1 (Table 5).

Table 5 Ratio of Home Language to Mother Tongue Northwest Territories, Census 2011

	Mother Tongue	Home Language	Ratio (%)
English	31,380	36,480	1.2
French	1,075	550	0.5
Cree	135	20	0.1
Dene (Incl. Chipewyan)	450	170	0.4
Gwich'in	250	35	0.1
Inuinnaqtun	90	20	0.2
Inuktitut	190	45	0.2
Inuvialuktun	405	80	0.2
North Slavey	715	315	0.4
South Slavey	1,190	510	0.4
Tłįchǫ (Dogrib)	1,965	1,205	0.6

Notes:

1. Source: Statistics Canada
2. Mother Tongue is defined as the first language learned in childhood and still understood.
3. Home Language is defined as the language most often spoken at home.
4. Statistics Canada employs a random rounding process for confidentiality. As a result, the sum of the components may not exactly equal the totals. Further, figures may differ by 5 or 10 between tables as the random rounding process is conducted on each table separately.
5. Statistics Canada changes the specific languages they report based on the results of the Census; languages they reported on In 2006 may be different for 2011. Where possible, language groups have been disaggregated or combined to provide comparable results to 2006.

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